

from
China

National Christians

A Call to a Forward Movement

by the

Christian Church of China



(Adopted by the National Christian Council of China,
At Its Third Annual Meeting Held at Shanghai,
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A FORWARD MOVEMENT BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The National Christian Council of China at its third annual meeting held at Shanghai, May 13-20, 1925 adopted a call for a "Forward Movement by the Christian Church of China." Bishop Logan S. Roots, D.D., of Hankow, China, who has just reached New York, has kindly provided the following English translation.

The National Christian Council of China greets the Churches throughout China in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Gathered in Shanghai from all parts of the country we have spent much time in considering the state of the Church and the needs of China. We believe that the Spirit of God calls us all to a definite forward movement in and by the Church in order that we may better serve the people as a whole.

Are not the notes of this forward movement three—truth, freedom and love? Let us sound forth these notes with courage and clearness!

TRUTH

The Christian Church believes in the majesty of truth. We must seek truth with all our hearts, speak it with courage, act upon it whatever the consequences. To those who say it matters not what one believes we answer there is an eternal difference between truth and falsehood. To believe the former is life indeed; to believe the latter is fatal. The Church is called to set forth the truth that Jesus Christ is the revelation of the Father and that in Him there is salvation for men and nations. We have no cause to apologize for this truth or to fear for it. We welcome all honest enquiry, and we know that even bitter attacks and wilful misrepresentations cannot alter the facts on which the Christian Church rests. But this truth is not simply a matter of past history. The triumphant witness to truth rests upon the personal experience of the living Christ in His Church today. This truth will be passed by contagion from one to another as it transforms our own lives. This is the chief method of evangelism.

Christianity welcomes truth wherever it may be found. The great truths seen by China's sages come from the one source of all truth which is in God. The Church needs to make a far larger use of Chinese literature as a preparation for the full light to be found in Jesus Christ. We ask missionaries to study this literature with greater care and appreciation.

We ask schools to give it a larger place in the curriculum. We plan, through our own Committee, to make special studies in this field during the year so that all that is of worth in Chinese thought, culture and customs may be retained and passed on unimpaired and even enriched to the new generation. In particular we plan to study whether the Church cannot help its members to preserve and Christianize China's invaluable sense of corporate family life to commemorate ancestors and to maintain more fitly the attitude of respect to parents.

Even in our own schools and churches there are many who fall far short in their apprehension of truth. If we are to give the message we must have better education in the Christian religion and particularly in the Bible itself. We ask all who teach to consider the content of their religious teaching, to use the very best methods and to pay heed to their own spiritual lives that through them the truth may be passed on to their pupils. We are planning to give thought and attention to this matter through the year and we suggest the value of retreats for teachers where these matters can be prayerfully faced.

We do not pretend to know all truth. We want to maintain the scientific spirit ever eager to discover more, ever willing to re-state and re-examine. There is no conflict whatever between true science and true religion. But humbly and with confidence we call our brethren to set forth courageously the fact that Jesus Christ is Himself the Truth and to show how the nation may be saved through Him. It is often hard to follow truth. It tears away the comfort of falsehoods and half-truths. But such comfort leads to disaster. This is the same with individual, church or nation. *Let us dare to be true!*

FREEDOM

The Church holds the principle of freedom to be fundamental and vital. This principle rests upon the worth of each man before God. Because Christ loved men and died to save them and set them free from the bondage of sin we know that men are of infinite value to God our Father. We proclaim the rights of all men, women and children, and we must work for recognition of those rights just because we are named by the name of Christ.

It is by some supposed that the Church depends upon and

is subservient to earthly governments. That churches in the past have sometimes failed in this particular is clearly seen in history. It is therefore all the more necessary that the Church in China make clear that it is a spiritual body owing allegiance only to God our Father and to Jesus Christ its living Head. The Christian should love his country, strive for its freedom and be loyal to its laws. Only if those laws are not in harmony with divine principles dare he disobey them. To the Christian freedom is not lack of all restraint, but true freedom means the increasing substitution of inward for outward control as man's spirit makes progress towards its goal. The Christian religion, then, can never be forced upon a man or a nation. We feel called upon to consider carefully whether in any degree we have departed from this principle in our teaching of religion.

In particular it is clear to us that there is still a lack of the most effective Chinese leadership in the Church due not so much to scarcity of potential leaders as to a failure to secure conditions under which real leadership can develop. We call the churches, missions and institutions of higher learning to study this question in order to see how far the hindrance lies in the foreign type of organization which gives little scope to the genius of the Chinese people and how far the control of work by foreign organizations and finance creates conditions unacceptable to those who might come forward. Bold action is needed in providing larger opportunity for the exercise of initiative and the right of experiment in re-shaping policy and in helping young leaders to work their way through the initial difficulties. Above all it is in comradeship, in the closest fellowship between older and younger, between missionary and Chinese, that this problem will be solved. These are days of transition and the path to freedom may be painful for all concerned. The goal, however, must never be in doubt.

Democracy has not always found Church organizations which could meet its demands. For this reason it is necessary that the Church in China shows clearly that it cares intensely and passionately for freedom. To set forth our Gospel without any form of compulsion, but so that all may freely take; to work out in our Church life the best in Democracy and not to get into political methods which mar the spiritual harmony—these are part of the Church's task in her forward movement.

To take the path of freedom always involves grave risks. There is a price to pay which we cannot evade. *Let us dare to be free!*

LOVE

The Christian Church is the creation of the God of love. Its every act and thought should be an expression of love—such love as we see shining forth from the life of our Lord and supremely from the Cross. For Christ first loved us and gave Himself for the Church and we have no right to be called by His name unless we love one another and all men. If we can show this love by the close personal relations between missionaries and Chinese, between learned and unlearned, between master and servant inside the borders of the Church, we thereby become a bright and shining light to all the nation. If we can meet those who criticize us with patience, forgiveness and a great desire to help them even in humble ways, we may bring them to understand that Christianity is not an aggressive and dangerous power in the midst of the nation, but rather points the way to harmony.

Alas! Christendom seems to many to be expressing itself more by gunboats and armies than by gentleness and forgiveness. The aggressive manifestation of western civilization is no part of the Christian Gospel. We have to admit that no country is truly Christian and that many so-called are still, in some of their relations with other countries, denying Christ. This whole question is very difficult to understand for those who have received Christianity from the very same countries which have menaced and injured China in the past and which maintain huge armies and navies today. Scarcely less difficult is the position of the missionary who desires to dissociate himself from all that is un-Christian in his own nation, but who has a responsibility to it as a citizen in a free country. We are planning to make the most careful study of this matter so that when we next meet we may be able to see clearly what in the present situation in China is the expression of the Christian way of love.

Further, we would call on the Mission Boards to pay very special attention to the need for a right attitude of respect for and understanding of China on the part of those who come out as missionaries. It is possible by failure here to do

harm rather than good even when the intentions are admirable. While recognizing an attitude of increasing friendliness towards China on the part of foreign Powers generally we believe that when foreign governments carry out aggressive designs in China or fail to show due respect to her as a member of the family of nations, Christian love calls for plain-speaking especially by the Christian citizens of the country concerned. In the past it cannot be denied that there has been failure in this matter.

Love prompts us to care intensely for the oppressed and this is especially the case with large classes who are perpetually down-trodden. The forward movement of the Church needs to include a determined effort to improve the condition of the workers, and the relation between employer and employee and a fearless handling of all that is contrary to love in the social and industrial life.

What a vast field of endeavour opens before us! Love is no mere word to pass lightly from lip to lip. Love means a way of life that involves hard thinking, patient toil, suffering and it might even be death. Love lived out by the Church is the one triumphant answer to any who may oppose her. It was Christ's answer on the cross—*Let us dare to love.*

A FORWARD MOVEMENT

A forward movement by the Church on these lines will naturally draw to itself the best elements in the country; it will knit the Christian and the Scientist in patient search for truth; it will show how to ground democracy on unshakable foundations; it will give passion and power to all movements for social betterment.

In this movement the Chinese Church still needs the co-operation of its missionary friends, less in the future than in the past as those in authority; increasingly as comrades, willing to give the highest gifts of scholarship, Christian experience and brotherly love in the spirit of the servant. For such a movement the generous giving of Chinese and foreign friends is needed, but the gifts should be made available in such a way that they impose no restraint on the free movement of the living spirit.

Thus will the missionary movement *to* China lose itself in the forward movement of the Christian Church *in* China.

Thus will the Church establish itself unmistakably before the nation as the representative of a spiritual religion rooted and grounded in love.

What will be the characteristic activities of such a movement? We would briefly enumerate ten:

1. The blameless life of the individual, the maintenance of Church life and fellowship and the exhibition of personal relationships within the Church which explain to all the meaning of Christ's way of life.

2. Continued proclamation of the Gospel without patronage or compulsion and particularly by each individual in his own sphere so that Christ may be presented with compelling power as the Saviour both of individuals and of the nation.

3. Retreats wherein an intimate fellowship is developed in the study of the Bible, in prayer and in facing the deeper issues of our life and work.

4. The improvement of our religious education in school and church that it may meet the actual need of the student and enable him clearly to grasp the meaning of Christianity.

5. A large output of literature spontaneously produced under no compulsion but that of the Spirit to meet the many new questions arising today, and to stimulate creative thinking in the Church.

6. Patient and loving coöperation between missionary and Chinese in seeking a solution of the intricate problems of this transition stage in the Church's life.

7. A thorough and sympathetic study of Chinese culture and literature and a greater use thereof in teaching and preaching.

8. A careful study of the international situation in the Far East and a determined attempt to apply the principles of Christ in this field.

9. A united and vigorous crusade against the social evils which bring the people into bondage and particularly against opium and militarism.

10. A new attempt to work out the meaning of Christian love in the home, in the factory, in business, in every sphere of life, all of which must be claimed as fit fields for the actual expression of the principles of our religion.

The National Christian Council puts forth this call with a full sense of past mistakes and of our weakness in the face of many grave evils. Nevertheless it is put forth in the confident belief that, as we listen, we shall hear in these days what the Spirit saith to the Churches and that the call of God always brings the assurance that His infinite wisdom, love and power are available for those who dare to obey. Let us not be disobedient to the heavenly vision.